

informing a campaign to prevent drug-impaired driving

prepared by the magnetic collective
for Ad Council & NHTSA

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why we're here

Objectives, who we spoke with & where

research objectives

Ultimately, to gather rich insights to inform an impactful social norming campaign to help reduce drug-impaired driving nationwide

Gaining a deeper understanding of current attitudes and behaviors surrounding use of marijuana and the decision to drive

- perceptions, understanding, and experiences with marijuana use and drug impaired driving
- what are the motivating factors and influencers at play
- digging deeper to understand any current efforts they're making to prevent risk and barriers stopping them
- considering motivations and obstacles for making alternative choices at the moment of decision

Understanding the general terminology/slang used by the target audience

- specifically, their perception of 'buzzed driving', how does it resonate; Gauging awareness and understanding, how can it be tailored and optimized for impact with these groups



who we spoke with & where

6x 2-hour workshops with men ages
18–34 across three cities

- Alexandria, VA
- St. Louis, MO
- Sacramento, CA

in each city, speaking with 6 participants per session

- 1x group ages 18–25
- 1x group ages 26–34

recruitment specs:

- men, ages 18–34
- mix of race/ethnicities, household income, occupations, urban/suburban
- must hold a drivers license, own an automobile, and drive regularly
- must drive to/from social occasions at least occasionally
- smoked marijuana recreationally at least once in past 3 months
 - a range of frequency, from regular users (several x per week, to more occasional users)
- range of attitudes about driving with a marijuana buzz
- articulate and engaged

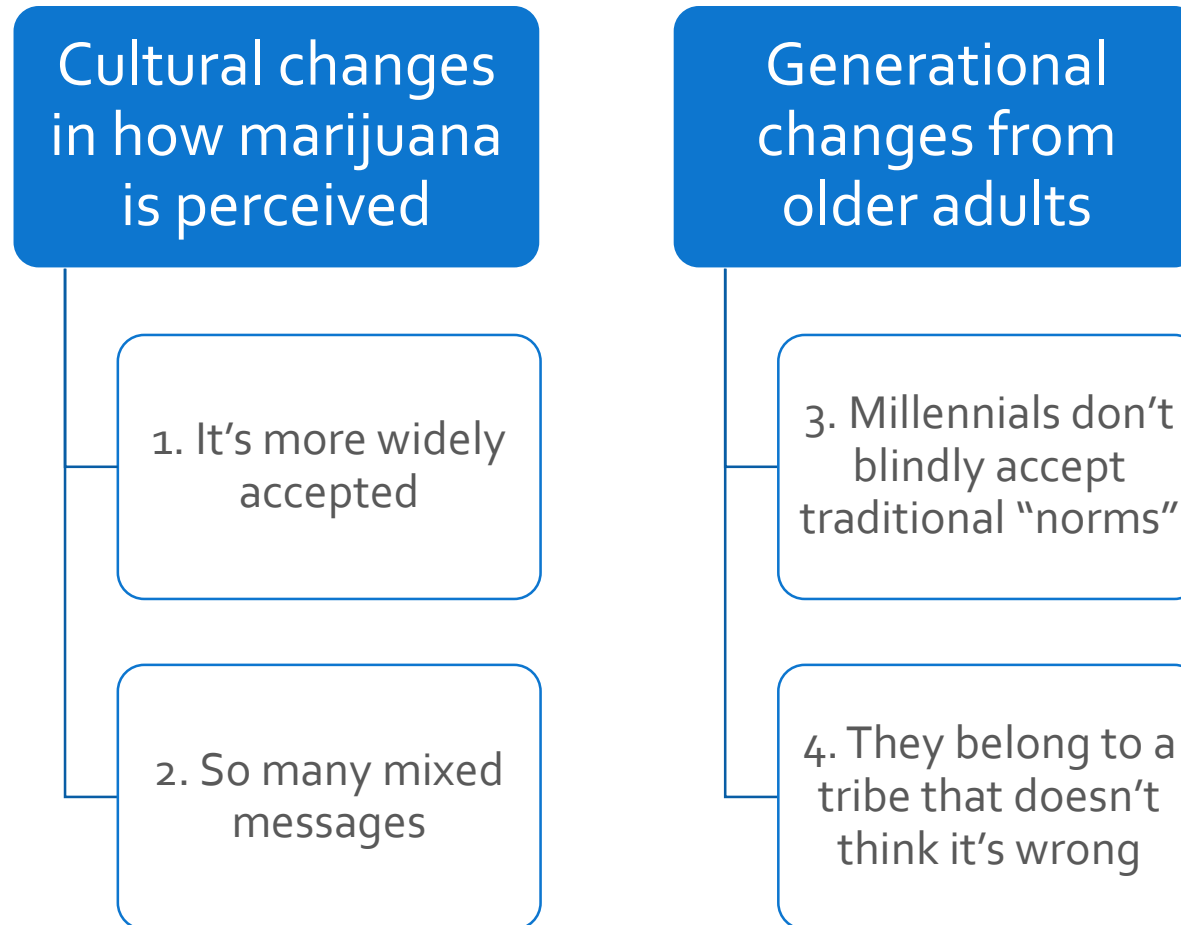


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cultural context

social dynamics to bear in mind

confluence of four social factors explains why more young adults are driving after using marijuana



millennials and gen z have seen marijuana become much more widely accepted in their lifetime

FROM

Medical marijuana
use legalized in CA

"Just say no"... since
it's a **drug** just like
cocaine and heroine

TO

Recreational use now
legal in several states

"Maybe ask why"... lack of
science about this mood-
enhancing **substance**

many doubt or dismiss most of what they're being told about marijuana as propaganda

So many mixed messages when it comes to marijuana

- Illegal at the Federal level, but ultimately states decide
- Grew up being told marijuana is dangerous and a gateway drug, but that didn't ring true with their own experiences
- Prior PSAs have over-exaggerated effects & consequences

"It's a generational thing, a lot of people remember Reagan saying marijuana could be the most dangerous drug of all." – Older male; DC

"It goes back to the stigma, most of our bosses are 20 years older who were raised with the stigma that weed is bad, don't ever touch it." – Older male; SAC

"I'm reminded of early 2000s marijuana ads, where the girl is going home and completely sinking into the couch after smoking, please don't do that." – Older male; STL

hard-wired for we vs. me think

Today's young adults tend to think more broadly than themselves in social settings

Unlike Baby Boomers and Gen X, today's young adults are more prone to sharing and inclusion—and **questioning social norms**

Diversity doesn't only apply to race and gender, it also means being **tolerant of views and behaviors they may not agree with**

Culturally, they've been encouraged to accumulate experiences and many believe life is a journey to find and hone their best, true selves—which requires trial and error (**experimentation**)

This is a generation that's more cooperative and collaborative than 'me-first.' With messaging, remember they're super marketing savvy and their sense of '**self**' is **often rooted in the role or distinct qualities they add to their group or community**



our target feels connected to a larger, more enlightened tribe

Their shared ideology is rooted in a belief that marijuana is not only not dangerous, but actually possesses numerous benefits

- running the gamut from physical, social, and psychological

Nearly all participants believe marijuana is much safer than alcohol, pharmaceuticals, and other drugs

- previous campaigns against drunk driving have taken hold
- for them, driving while even a little buzzed is “just stupid”

Many impassioned arguments that the stigma around marijuana is outdated and unfair; They’re not lazy, hippies!

A high-contrast, black and white silhouette of a person with curly hair, shown in profile from the chest up. They are holding a lit cigarette in their mouth and another cigarette in their right hand. The background is a light-colored brick wall. The overall mood is contemplative or somber.

3

about the target

attitudes, behaviors, preferences & language used

**Using marijuana is a really
positive experience for them**

**They believe it only further adds
value to their lives and there's no
downside to it**



they started experimenting during adolescence

Many use marijuana for the first time when they are teenagers

- while first times uses vary, most are in high school between ages 14-16, with some outliers
- they do mention, however, a gap in time between their first use and later recreational use in their adulthood

Discovering what they like is less of a hard science and more ‘feeling it out’

- unlike having individual drinks and developing taste with alcohol, it’s more about knowing yourself and how you want to feel
 - “It all comes down to experience, you try different things to know what you feel comfortable with.” – Older male; DC

There’s a sense of pride in figuring out their preferences along the way

- because they grew up when marijuana was illegal, preference was largely a result of personal curation
- discovering ways and reassessing methods to optimize their personal “high”
 - “Any times when there’s a new thing to try, I have to think of a new measure of standard.”- Older male; SAC

But everyone’s experience with marijuana is slightly different

- because it’s effects can vary from person to person, it plays into the idea that it’s the type of substance everyone can uniquely benefit from using



really only see benefits from using marijuana

“It’s the same as back in the day when someone comes home and has a nightcap, like a glass of scotch, it just takes the edge off.”

– Older male; STL

In their minds, marijuana makes everything better
Physically...

- helps with sleep and relaxation (or hangover cure)
- provides an energy boost to get task done
- alleviates pain and helps with physical intimacy

Emotionally ...

- eases general anxiety and stress, like an alternative to a post-work drink
- gives them ability to focus on precise task, like playing video games

Ultimately, they don’t see drawbacks

- only in recognizing their own errors, like taking too big of a hit or dose, results in a less positive experience

they enjoy it because it enhances their lives



Lightens up
the mood

brings out good vibes

“I don’t really use it in stressful situations, mostly with people when we’re already having fun. It just puts me on a whole other level.”

– Older male; SAC

maintaining positive emotions

“It makes me basically get through the day without going off on somebody because I’m happier.”

– Older male; SAC



Improves
social skills

people are more open minded

“We’re all open to communication, empathize with others, less judgment, more patient, more open.” – Older male; SAC

catalyst for conversation

“It brings people together, you might give them a hit, it breaks the divide a little bit, it’s social it’s good.”

– Younger male; STL



Creates a sense of
community

most prefer to use with friends

“I feel like it enhances everything. That’s why it’s great at concerts, you feel the energy of situations and people around you.” – Older male; DC

it’s largely a social pastime

brought along to occasions like concerts, festivals, house parties or camping



yet, their perspective and behaviors evolve over time

Commonalities do exist between younger and older users, specifically

- believe it helps them enjoy experiences more
- helps them find joy in mundane tasks
- they have a more acute awareness of themselves

Younger users are more concerned with how others see them, i.e.

“If I’m able to show my true self, then other people will like me”

- use as a way to enjoy time with friends/peers
- believes it facilitates friendship, used as social lubricant
- more often they are experimenting with other substances

Older users are shifting their focus to consider wellbeing of others, i.e.

“If I’m more at ease, it makes me a better partner and everyone benefits”

- helps them relax while being around people they trust
- serves as a mood stabilizer after daily stressors, responsibilities
- they know their actions have consequences for others who are dependent on them, i.e. their spouse/children
- most settle into a more defined routine, less experimentation

with plenty of options, most still prefer to smoke weed

With legalization comes a proliferation of new formats to consume marijuana

- instills a belief there's no one right way, but many ways to enjoy
- it also means they can create a custom experience for themselves

Formats mentioned include...

most often: joints, blunts, pipes, bubblers, bong

sometimes: vape pens, edibles

less often: dabbing, wax from THC concentrates

honorable mentions: CBD oils, THC tinctures, drinks mixed with THC

Most prefer to smoke for its practicality and comfort

- it's the "old school" way with little waste
- with edibles it's harder to control the dosage and reaction time
- dabbing and wax are used less frequently because the high is so intense, and consequently, reserved for fewer occasions

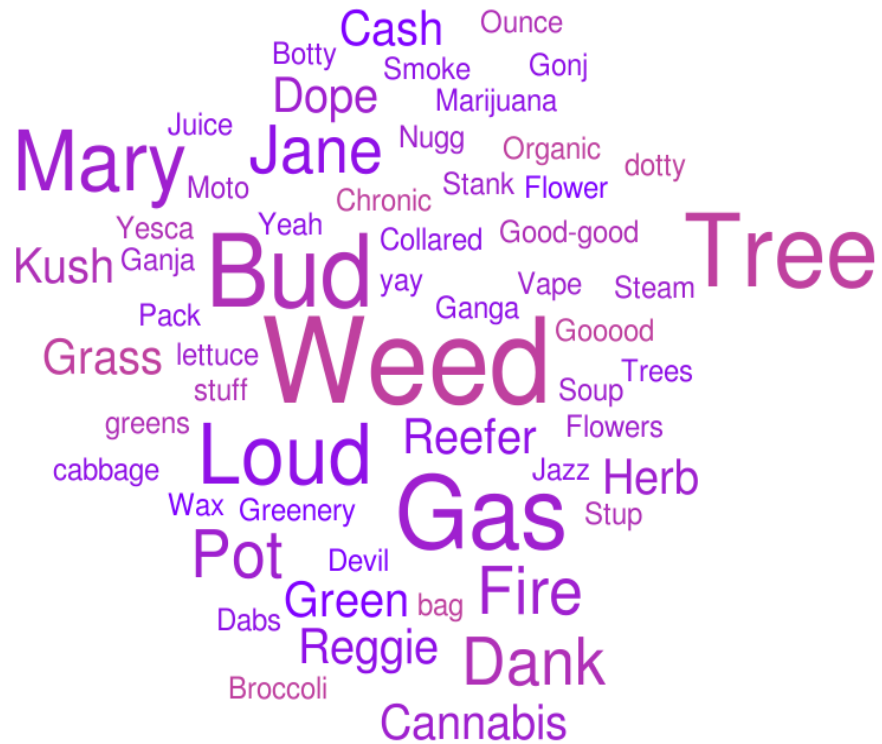
A deep appreciation for the ritual aspect of smoking

- many derive a sense of enjoyment from picking and preparing their product, similar to cooking with food
- by being hands on, they have a closer connection to the product and an overall connectedness to the experience

"I like the process of smoking. I like grinding it up and packing my piece and it's fun and part of the entire experience. The experience is almost as important as being high anymore." – Older male; DC



discretion is key when describing marijuana



Weed and bud are the most ubiquitous words, they cut across generations

- from our learnings several words were regional-specific, but we also learned across markets there are some commonalities
- gas, a word referenced in rap lyrics, was also frequently mentioned as “high quality” marijuana

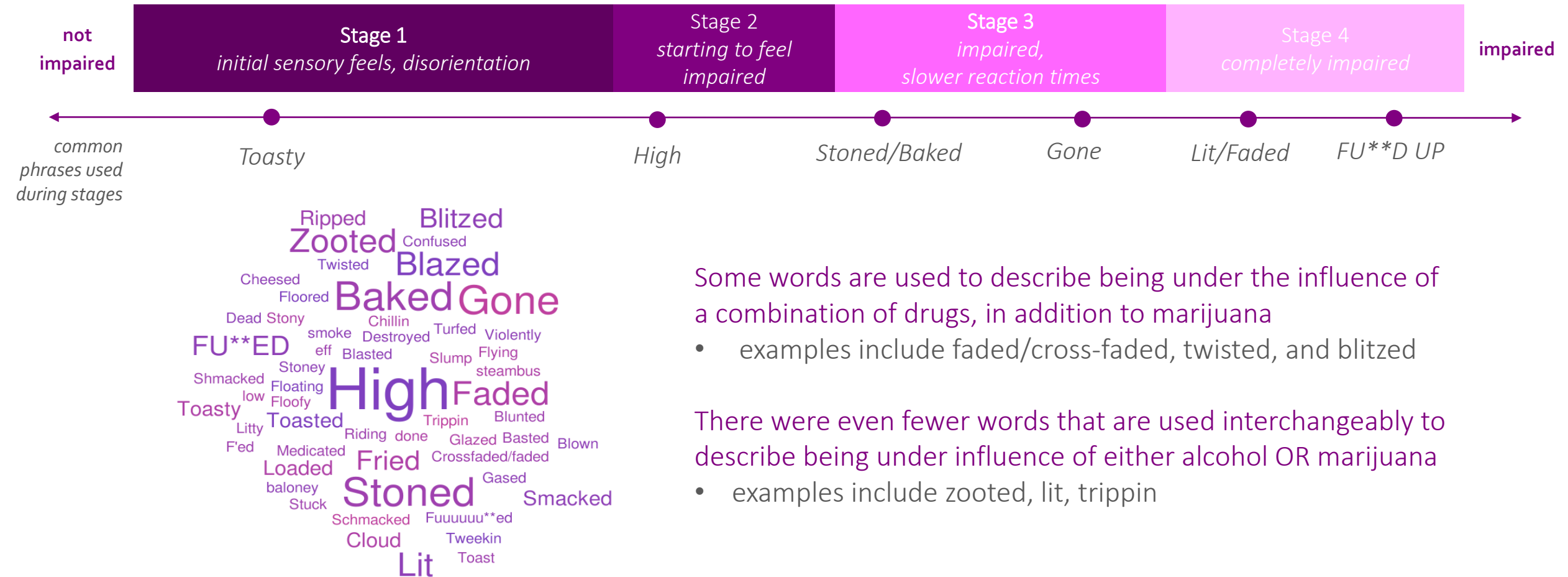
Some terms used as a code amongst friends

- helps when discussing or purchasing discreetly, especially in states where marijuana is not legal
- phrases that are purposefully vague are often used in text, e.g. yeah, yay, let's get that stuff, fire
 - "You might pick up some really good stuff and then say that in a text to your boy." – Younger male; DC
- some also reference flora when describing, e.g. tree, grass, weed, herb

Product descriptions often refer to its physical structure

- describing the flower, or cannabis leaf, with likeness to other things, i.e. nugg, nugget, green, bud, broccoli

despite individual descriptors for impairment, they universally define it in similar stages



no adequate descriptor for marijuana users

many bristle at the harsh and negative cultural associations around users of marijuana

Across markets, a strong disdain towards stoner stereotype

- they believe society is quick to paint stoners as people who are lazy with no ambitions or responsibilities
 - “I don’t like how society gives it a derogatory feeling, like it’s as bad as a sub-culture.” – Older male; STL

In fact, they have a high regard for other users of marijuana

- many are quick to provide personal anecdotes to combat the negative stoner stigma
- despite differences, they easily relate to one another, and even bond over their shared enjoyment and experiences





4

their take on the issue

driving while under the influence of marijuana

**Friends and societal cues
enable a belief it's ok driving
under marijuana's influence**

casual attitudes on driving after using marijuana are ingrained by early adulthood

Car rides with friends are the first places that many try marijuana with during their teen years

- driving reduces chances of getting caught at home
- taking “blunt rides” on routes “not hot” with police

Over time and in the company of peers, they come to associate using marijuana and driving as a regular part of hanging out

- they’re less rowdy and distracted with females in the car

And with trial and error comes a better sense of their own personal tolerance, so see staying within those limits as ‘safe’

"For me personally, it comes from high school senior year smoking regularly, I would drive to school and smoke on the way. I was always conditioned into smoking, it just happened" – Younger male; DC

"We'd always smoke in the car and drive." – Younger male; SAC

"When I was younger I had a route and everything. I would take some back roads, and smoke and chill out and drive." – Older male; DC

"I definitely had that mentality of 'I have to get home no matter what' when I was younger, even if that meant I was high and drove." – Younger male; STL



they're convinced marijuana does not impair their driving

In fact, they claim they're better drivers for many reasons:

- they have faster hand-eye coordination and reaction times
- will be more focused and less aggressive
- they take extra care in obeying traffic rules & regs
- err on the side of caution with speed (use cruise control)

Some shared other self-imposed “rules” related to familiarity

- drive with friends you know and trust
- never drive after having edibles
- stick to well-known areas or limit to quick trips nearby

“For me, when I smoke, it’s like almost like having spider senses. You’re highly acute of your surroundings, even your reaction time quickens.” – Older male; DC

glaring lack of consequences translates as: “no big deal”

Our target doesn't fear for themselves or others driving under marijuana's influence

They don't see or experience negative outcomes

- unaware and unconvinced of fatalities related to marijuana
- legal implications aren't a factor; too hard for cops to prove
- and notion of getting a ticket isn't overly concerning...
- having their stash confiscated is worst that could happen

Just in case, they live by an 'honesty is the best policy' code

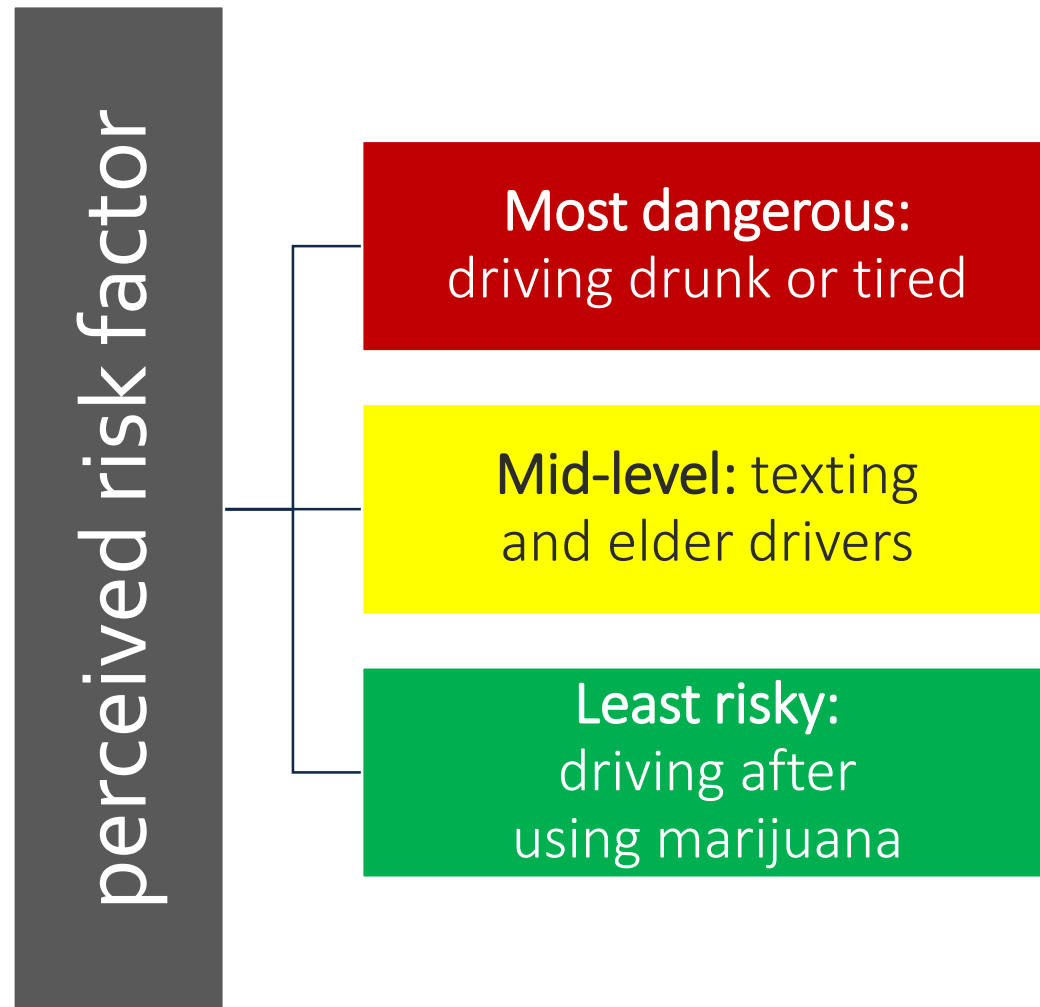
- believe officers are more lenient if they level with them
- a few said police actually let them go after being stopped

“I've been pulled over high. They say don't smoke in the car. I've also had weed in the car and they didn't take it. Yeah, I got pulled over too, and they just made the person who wasn't smoking drive the car home.” – Younger males; SAC

They don't weigh risks of
driving under the influence
of marijuana on its own

Instead, they compare it
favorably to driving drunk

driving after using marijuana is a lower-level concern



Shared sense that **alcohol alters you**: from lowering inhibitions, fueling over-confidence of abilities, to significant and objective physical impairment

Conversely, **marijuana enhances you**: It doesn't transform or impair, it brings out the best in you and your abilities

Participants also quick to note that driving is inherently risky and there are bad drivers are out there regardless

three types of justifiers in play

*The things they'll often tell themselves before driving impaired reveal **they're not morally conflicted**. Instead, they're more concerned with rationalizing their behavior*

I'm not at risk

- *I've got eye drops, no one can tell*
- *I'm not drunk and can snap out of it if needed*
- *There's no weed or paraphernalia in the car*
- *I'm with friends that I trust*
- *I'll be extra cautious and focused*

It's not that far away

- *It's a short ride; I'll be right back*
- *Just getting some food...or smokes...or dropping off a friend*

It's not unfamiliar territory

- *I've done this countless times*
- *I know this area and these streets well*
- *I'll just take back streets where I know there aren't cops*


No key differences by market, but a few differences by age

The younger males...

- spend majority of their high time in the car together
- more often in a group; less likely to be driving alone
- more likely to be all-guys vs. mixed gender
- longer road trips are fun!

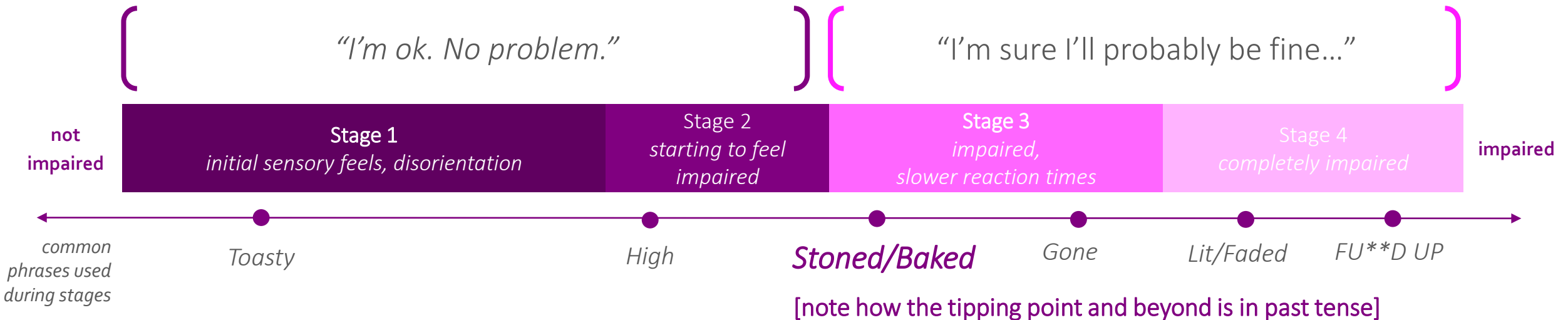
The older males...

- most of their time in the car is for getting there and back
- drive solo more than their younger counterparts
- longer road trips are...kinda risky
- overall, with more experience comes confidence and savvy; they're less likely to make rookie mistakes



"I can't do a road trip or drive a long distance without smoking. I focus more when I drive. My family lives three hours south from here and if I drive down there sober it's stressful, but if I'm high, it's a smooth mellow ride with music." – Younger male; STL

stage 3 is when they'll self-assess if they're "good to go" ...but most decide they're fine and actually drive



Buzzed driving doesn't "fit" with driving after using marijuana

*"There's a reason 'buzzed' isn't on the list, it's strictly associated with alcohol."
– Younger male; DC*



5

the way forward

putting it all together to inform a new strategy

key learning reveals magnitude of our challenge

Marijuana is increasingly more socially acceptable

So many mixed signals;
Absence of real science

Most have been using marijuana and driving "successfully" for years

They truly think they're better and safer drivers after using marijuana

They don't see hypocrisy driving high since it's far safer than driving drunk

They know it's hard to legally prove that they're impaired by marijuana

what are realistic expectations for this future campaign?

We need to start with an end in mind to inform the strategy

Things we know:

- telling them “don’t do it” on its own won’t work
- attitudes around marijuana are quickly evolving
- much doubt on how “impairment” is legally defined/tested

What metrics are we going to use to tell if we’re successful?

- is it fewer number of positive blood tests...
- or potentially, better to serve as a conversation-starter?

We suggest making it binary and avoid debating the issue

- with so many unknowns, let’s *focus on what we do know*—and that’s the fact that *it’s illegal and will result in a DUI*





consider targeting women too

as marijuana's popularity & social acceptance increases, driving impaired isn't only a 'boy's thing'

Only speaking to half of the young adult population carries risks

- limiting this important conversation by gender is out of step with Millennials' sensibilities, and besides...
- we consistently heard in our conversations that women are very much partaking in the fun and often driving too

Now, some potential ways of talking about this issue that will resonate with our audience, starting with what not to do

Caution: presenting counter-evidence at odds with their tribal views can backfire and be dismissed as 'fake news'

they say they want real, science-based stats and facts, but that presents a potential double-bind

For law enforcement



- ☐ difficult to draw definitive conclusions about effects of marijuana based on available evidence
- ☐ 'drug-related' driving stats about impairment are tough to identify and isolate
- ☐ it's easier to convict with alcohol Breathalyzer

For marijuana users



- ☐ have lived in an echo-chamber that has been repeating same talking points for decades
- ☐ most don't consider marijuana a real 'drug'
- ☐ low awareness of any testing or other detection methods for driving under influence of marijuana

thought-starters for strategic messaging approaches

Don't let the rest of your tribe down

- **Human truth:** they hate the negative stereotype about marijuana users
- Describe how selfish actions reflect on other users; Remind them not to do anything that would give non-users even more ammunition

Model the non-driving behavior you want to see in “THC users”

- **Human truth:** positivity will play better than being judgmental
- Change negative stereotype; Talk in terms of how being irresponsible kills the good time
- Focus on changing minds about driving, not using. Then model the behavior of the best tribe members (e.g. getting Uber)

Show them realistic consequences

- Potential to play up the contradictions of driving under influence on its own vs alcohol with the kinds of negative outcomes they already imagine
- **Human truth:** Historically, PSAs have over-dramatized what it's like to use & its effects

DUI is the most compelling negative consequence

The list of things that might deter them from driving under the influence of marijuana is short and marked by smaller stakes

Unrealistic and unlikely to convince

- accident resulting in a death or other scare tactics
- someone dramatically impaired, driving recklessly
- showcasing stereotypical user (hippie, lazy, unkempt, etc.)

More realistic and potentially compelling

- getting a DUI where others assume you were an idiot who drove drunk and also describing the financial implications
- feeling drowsy or dozing off
- talk in terms of (rookies?) not adding any extra factors
- messing up your car – e.g. curb-jump ruins axel or bumper
- letting your children or other respected people down

“With a DUI, you associate me with being a drunk driver, that’s shitty, I don’t like that! (That) says you don’t care about anyone else’s lives but yours.” – Younger male, DC

“I don’t want to spend more money, have points on my drivers license, insurance rates go up. I don’t want to deal with court fees.” – Younger male; STL

“Its expensive. It’s on your record for 10 years, and insurance – if I’m going to be in the system for something, it should be for an actual crime.”
- Younger male; SAC

“I would tell my daughter until you feel comfortable, you shouldn’t add any other factors like extra people in the car, loud music, or smoking into your driving experience, just keep it simple.” – Older male; DC

Most self-identify with a tribe of diverse & enlightened users

"Make the campaign in a social aspect or a group example. This is a social thing, not an alone thing." – Younger male; DC



“Don’t try to (show) what you think stoners are like. Don’t dress the actors like stoners: No Bob Marley dreads. We wear normal shorts and t-shirts.” – Younger male; DC

If you misrepresent their tribe, you’ll lose them immediately

People who use marijuana aren’t all stoners

- a diverse group of ambitious, highly functional young people
- they’re earning college degrees or already have steady jobs
- take pride in being good dads, friends, significant others
- rather than dazed and absent-minded, it makes them focus

Many see themselves and others like them as being more open-minded, easy-going, and tolerant than rigid thinkers

They love to experience all they can from life; Marijuana makes music, video games, nature, and everything else even better

As marijuana becomes legal in more states, look for an increased proliferation of formats and upscale, curated, craft ‘weederies’



considerations for tone to inform comms development

Be **empathetic** to the experience of users of marijuana, by using language to show you understand and are sensitive to accurately portraying their lifestyles

Be **frank** and direct about the realities of the legal status of driving impaired, address them the same honesty they would expect of themselves if they got pulled over

Don't be **judgmental** of the experience or reasons why they have come to use marijuana

Avoid **satire** or humorous scenarios where actions or behaviors of using can quickly become hyperbolic and unrealistic

appendix



channels used most often are for lean back content

Snapchat and Instagram are the social media apps most frequently used by your target

- apps let them passively keep in touch with their friends lives through stories and posts/snaps and they can follow and view other content they enjoy

Some (mostly older target) use Reddit similarly to other social media apps

- gives them anonymous access to groups of like-minded individuals on topics that interest them

Many mention YouTube as a source of entertainment

- but largely passive and done on their own time alone
- view videos for their own personal interests and sometimes share



thank you!

Kelsey Ellefson

kelsey@themagneticcollective.com

Keith Navratil

keith@themagneticcollective.com